

TOAST TO GRIMESBY ROYLOTT

by W. Scott Monty

The Speckled Band of Boston, May 14, 1999

I began thinking about this toast many weeks ago and wondered what I, as a younger member of the Band, could say about this formidable man that hasn't been said over the years. (Or course, we all fondly recall George Burrows calling him a "Baaaad man.")

While the conventional view of him is:

Dr. Grimesby Rolott, the ophidian flake,
Who killed his stepdaughter using a snake,

I'd like to remind you that our antagonist could have been much, much worse – Holmes could have been dealing with a blood-sucking, venomous, slimy, slithering, bottom-dwelling, cold, calculating creature that stops at nothing until its victim surrenders. But Grimesby Roylott was a doctor, not a lawyer. I suppose, had the story been written in the 1990's, the villain would be an HMO director instead of a physician.

But let's focus on the man himself: the poor, unfortunate man. The odds were stacked against him from the beginning – the four previous heirs of Stoke Moran were dissolute and wasteful – how shameful for Grimmy! His wife died tragically and he returned to the country to a run-down Manor House after abandoning his practice in London. But were the neighbors welcoming? Nooooo! They expected more than was reasonable from this man.

He took solace in his nature walks, with the gypsies about, and took great comfort in his animals that roamed the estate. But Holmes compared him with Drs. Palmer and Pritchard, when in fact, he should have been comparing him to Dr. Doolittle.

This true gentleman was concerned about all of those in his household: he didn't want to bother the housekeeper, so he didn't attach a bell to the bellpull. How considerate! He even went to such lengths as to use a reptile to keep his daughters' rooms free of rodents. What a noble deed! He even soothed his daughters during the night by whistling to them. How caring!

Gentlemen, I suggest we reexamine our view of Dr. Grimesby Roylott and give him the credit he so richly deserves, for he was misunderstood and ostracized. Indeed, in his native county of Surrey, he was never accepted. He was seen as something of a loony, a misfit, an upper-class fringe-dweller. As a matter of fact, Watson may well have called this story "The Adventure of Surrey with the Fringe on Top."

SURREY WITH THE FRINGE ON TOP

Cheetahs and baboons better scurry
When Sherlock takes me down to Surrey,
When Sherlock takes me down to Surrey with the fringe on top!

The Manor House is all in a clutter,
Windows locked, can't get past the shutter,
More clues here than the parsley in butter for our private cop!

The gypsies are camped, the cheetah's around,
The doctor's always frownin';
Holmes and I will stay right in town
At a room we reserved at the Crown Inn!

Clock struck nine, Helen's lamp was a-shining,
I sure wish that I was a-dining,
Holmes had spent the ev'ning divining, his mind on top
Of the problem down in Surrey with the fringe on the top!

We had hoped that we now could aid her,
Snake recoiled through the ventilator,
Roylott screamed only one moment later, and his eyes did pop!

This bad doc had a plan to get richer,
Wound up just like Palmer and Pritchard,

A Sherlockian Toast (posted 2025-5-6)

Snake on his head, he a perfect picture of a dead step-pop!

The band was a snake, the bell-pull a rope,
The ventilator was an entry;
But it was clear that Holmes was no dope,
The solution was quite element'ry!

Now you see when there was a flurry,
When Holmes had to fly in a hurry,
To solve a problem down in Surrey, his form tip-top,
Down at Stoke Moran in Surrey with the fringe on the top!